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Wings Against the Wind

VIRGINIA SPATES

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DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
G. B. S.

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CHEATING AT SOLITAIRE

Now age comes slowly creeping.
Though she should catch my eye
In her subservient peeping,
Due devoirs I'll deny.

The sun has set. Now boldly
Phantoms of night draw near.
I listen to them coldly,—
Pretend I do not hear.

ON THE THRESHOLD

Closed doors are fascinating. Who can say
What lies beyond? We pause expectantly
Upon the threshold, listening. Shall we see
A kneeling form, surprise a kiss, and pay
The penalty of knowledge? Hiding may
Conceal despair,—the wounded ever flee
To solitude where they instinctively
Await the coming of a kinder day.

A door may open, brightening all your views
Of life; or softly close upon your hope,
You standing mute. Fate may present a key
That will unlock two doors; then you must choose
Between their maddening lure, and cold hands grope
For guidance, conscious of finality.

UNDER ETHER

A strange thing chanced the night that I was shot:
I saw the moon, a full-blown golden rose,
That faded as an icy meteor froze
Its petals till they blackened with vile rot,
And falling from the sky, become a blot
Upon the whiteness of the night. Who knows
What this portended? Nothing could disclose
More hideous woe than this—the moon was not.
A mighty voice boomed like a thunderous bell,
"Entombed alive, and praying death in vain;
A thing accursed, spewed from the maw of
hell" . . .
Then desolating fear and cruel pain
Were broken by astounding miracle!
The golden-petaled rose had bloomed again.

THE HIDDEN HOUR

Time turns the glass:
Once more the ruddy sand will flow,
Each granule pregnant with events
Of joy or woe.

Imprisoned mound
Of desert warmth, time's beacon light,
Impel your slender thread of flame
To quicker flight.

You hold within
Your crystal dome all gifts of power,
Would I might read my future now,
Before the hour.

Entranced I watch
Your silent stream of mystery. . . .
Dear God!—what if some stealthy grain
Holds death for me!

WISTFUL HEARTS

Life is forever lonely. You and I
Shall not be more so on that silent day
Than speaking brightly to each passer-by
Upon our own familiar street. They say
The heart of man is a peculiar thing:
Secret, yet wistful to be understood,
A fitful mystery of gossamer wing
Seen dimly in the shadow of a wood.

Now something, though intangible, steals near
That numbs our seeking touch, till no man knows
With certainty the heart of one most dear.
Could hearts have opened as a perfect rose
That blooms unconscious of all care or strife,
How sweet a thing it would have made of life.

NO STRANGER THOUGHT

The dead return. "Impossible!" you cry?
No stranger thought than this: the living die.

CONFIDENCE

Aware my spirit preened itself for flight,
I questioned thus in anguished doubt: "O soul,
Have you no dread of void beyond the night?"
"My being," it replied, "assures a goal."

WINGS AGAINST THE WIND

The wings that battle as they may
Against too urgent winds that blow,
Feel joy in choosing their own way
Compliant chaff can never know.

What shame to breast the storm and fail?
They drift the wind, already dead,
Who fear to buck the stinging gale
While life is young and blood is red.

DREAMS

Life is enhanced because reality
At times enfolds the fragment of a dream;
And dingy facts become white sails that gleam
Beyond the shadows of an unknown sea.
Deep is the human need of mystery:
What is must never be what it may seem,
But rather something high; rich to redeem
Dark bestial substance from its low degree.
Say not a dream is empty! It is all
The perfume of man's heart; the fecund seed
Of ecstasy; bright pinion of hope's birth.
How else endure? We cannnot but recall
The dreams that lifted us, at sorest need,
Above the cold and darkness of the earth.

WAR

A whining bullet pierces, shakes
The doors of Janus, flings them wide,
And sleeping beast in man awakes
To watch the four dread horsemen ride.

PEACE

With crimson wounds and aching battle scars,
Unconquered by repeated loss on loss,
Peace makes advance upon the dragon Mars—
Her swordless hands uplift a broken cross.

WORD FROM A SON

I am the one you seek.
Mark's mother sent me word
By you? Is Judas—ill?
Quick, man, I have not heard.

The high priest says my boy
Betrayed Christ for a price?
A lie! A viper's sting!
He dare not say it twice.
. . . . . .

Then he was forced; some twist
Of fate left him not free
To choose. . . . He sold his Lord
In dark Gethsemane?

My Judas dead . . . and Christ . . .
O God, make me the one
Forever lost through this!
Spare him, my son, my son.

COURAGE

Have you read what sorrow writes upon the wall,
Where the spotted moonlight lingers
Before night's curtain lifts at the cock's call?

Have you listened to the faint wind crying
Down the dark and barren valley
Of your yesterday; all your dreams of beauty
    dying?

Have you heard the muted music of the sea—
Cold sea beneath a colder sky—
Each insistant note a stab of memory?

Have you wished the sullen day would never
    come,
Though interminable hours weigh
Heavy as your brooding thoughts are, bleak and
    numb.

Have you felt betrayed; with no place anywhere
In all the universe your own? . . .
Then stout the heart that overcame despair!

NOT ABSOLUTELY

All white is white and black is black, you say?
No, my dear sir, a thousand times not so.
For white is often but a dingy gray,
And black is sometimes shot with crimson glow.

IMPLACABLE

Life preens bright pinions in the sun of May.
A fleshless hand despoils them day by day.

CAN MAN ENDURE THE TRUTH?

It cannot be the ancient gods are dead!
Is not Olympus blue against the sky
With Zeus enthroned; black thunder on his thigh,
Death-dealing lightning on his mighty head?
Man must needs pray no matter what be said
In ridicule. A blasphemy to cry
Down old beloved traditions; to defy
The gods while heaven echoes to their tread.

Now that the secret veil is torn away;
Bright glory trailed upon the sodden earth
Beneath the restless feet of eager Ruth;
Deem it not strange if on some future day,
Mankind, unconscious of the high gods' mirth,
Is withered by the cold, white blaze of Truth.

THE FLOWER OF DEATH

The tide has turned;—
There drifts a flower
Dimly discerned . . . .
It served its hour.

A sprig of May
Once virginal, fair,
Then cast away
With none to care.

Now far from shore,
Dawn breaking bright,
It seems once more
Fresh, April-white.

RADIO

O magic harp! who strung your airy strings
Across the stretch of continents? Whose hand
Plucks music from the void? Amazed we stand
Upon the verge of mystery that flings
Beyond past thought. An unknown power brings
Sweet harmonies to life at our command;
A rare sound floats to us from fairyland,
Or is it some far carillon that rings?

Great energy! that freed the patient earth
From chains that bound her fast to time and space,
What high endeavor shall engage your worth,
What radiance bring; what ruth of night efface?
Does Aeolus sound joy bells for the birth
Of forces destined to transform the race?

ETERNITY

Not fear of dying pricks my pulses flow,
But thought of everlasting life. To know
Time is enough. If living had but run
From birth to death, were it not better done?
Eager to start, now shadows of the west
Encompass me, and make me long for rest,
When like a frightened child I dimly see
Stretching ahead a vast eternity,
Bright courage fails. Oh, strengthen me, I pray!
Keep close to me upon that endless way.

TO A DEAD BABY

Love's shattered hope,—
Bright drop of blood drawn hot
From seething hearts. . . .
That wanton death betrayed meantime.

What wonder dies
Because your hand shall not
Assume life's task?
What music mute, unwritten rime?

A Phidias lost?
Caesar, or saint forgot?
Far kinder life's
Unrest than sleep men call sublime.

PRAYER

Not a mere beggar whining evermore. . . .
But giving thanks; in silence to adore;
Or in some tragic unexpected hour,
To rest assured upon a mighty Power.

THE CRUX

Accounted blameless in Truth's searching light
Is knowing love and pity are indeed,
Above all righteousness of form or rite,
The great unchanging essence of life's creed.

THE CENTURION AT THE CROSS

Dear Lord,
I cannot offer you
White shards of alabaster
Dripping with priceless dew;

Nor cleanse
Your travel stains with tears;
The fountain of their being
Is dry these many years.

But I,
Amazed, may venture near
And proffer you in mercy
The bitterness of myrrh.

THE GRAPES OF GOD

Like jewels
In filigree silver,
Leaves dewy with morning,
You hang adorning
The vineyard of life.

O rejoice!
Neither tremble nor fear,
Abundance shall not fail,
Sun and rain, frost and hail,
Shall not betray you.

Your branches,
Now that the harvest is near,
Remember not the pain
Of pruning, through gain
In glory and strength.

COURAGEOUS DUST

I have gained the other side. . . .
Nevermore shall mortal tear
Sear my soul in agony,
I have passed beyond all fear.

Though become attuned to God,
And rejoicing in new birth—
Seeing in a clearer light
Evil powers that strove with me

When I was a part of earth—
I shall feel exultant pride
In my dust's courageous fight
Made against a heavy odd.

THE MISANTHROPE

Words, words, words!
Air is thick with them,
Earth is sick with them.
Words that sing and words that drone
In a dreary monotone
Dull to tears.
Go to hell for them,
Weave a spell for them
To ensnare the lion sun.
But until your way is won
To the spheres,
Cruel words will lie,
Endless words will cry
Day by day and night by night,
Never ending their mad flight
In your ears.

MY PRECIOUS SIN AND I

I took my sin to task one day,—
My very special, tiny sin,—
I said I was ashamed to pray,
Knowing God's patience had worn thin.

Sin listened quite admiringly,
As quickly I went on to state
It was absurd to flatter me
Because I could control my fate.

Then he, this child of Satan, said,
"My father is so keenly wise,
That not until a man is dead
Would he refuse to compromise."

THE UNDYING FLAME

When memory leads me down the path of youth,
I am amazed at what wast cast away
As little worth. I grasped at fair untruth
And lost the priceless pearl. The skies of May
Where softer then, I did not know that I
Should never see their like again. And June . . .
Ah, June . . . ! No night of brilliant stars
swung high
In winter's chilly hand out-dazzles noon.

O what a careless thing is youth! and yet
How sweet. It throws its glamor on our path
Long after it is fled. Should we forget
Its tears and smiles—life's golden aftermath—
How void of brightness later days would seem,
For when age comes, of vanished youth we—
dream.

THE WINGED HEART OF YOUTH

He leaned there shadowed from the noonday sun,
  Chin cupped on hand, bare feet below the blue
Of overalls. As I passed on I won
  No recognition, nor obscured his view:—

In day-dreams, he adventured far away . . .
  His slender body curved in careless ease
Was all unconscious of the pulsing day;
  His distant soul was on adoring knees.

In rapt delight, by paths unknown to me,
  Where heights arise, and secret waters flow
Beneath the earth, he found that ecstasy
  The winged heart of youth alone may know.

O little boy, that I might join you there,
Behold again lost visions of the air!

PERHAPS WE DREAMED

It seems not strange we should desert
  Our natural element to sail
The winds—outstrip the ramping clouds,
  Or watch the Pleiades grow pale.

So quickly does the mind adjust
  Itself to miracles of flight,
There must be latent memores
  Recalling some long-lost delight.

Slow ebony hands waved ivory wands
Whence streamed the peacock's shimmering brush
To stimulate the fleeting dawn's
Cool breath beyond noon's drowsy hush.
Ho, slave more light!
Then torches spilled
Their glamor on night's sullen gloom;
Where high lights strove, dark shadows killed
The trembling colors' wistful bloom.
Romantic but inadequate,
Those ancient slaves. For our delight
The water, air, all nature's great
Resources—labor day and night.

THE URGE OF THE AGES

Without well knowing how, man came
To feel his mastery. At his command
Great Ninevah arose, and Babylon.
His ardent heart burst into leaping flame
Of glorious power. Fused Egypt's sand;
Disclosed white miracles in Greece; passed on
To quicken Rome.
No matter where it flared,
Gigantic temples, etched upon the sky,
Revealed the urge to make accomplishment
Fulfill his dream. This urge we too have shared;
Thus understood, our skyscrapers are high
Cathedrals, mighty and magnificent.

NEW HOUSES

New houses always shall disclose
A subtle lack. Vain—echoing—
They needs must tattle everything.
Devoid of silence and repose
That only comes with many years
Of human contact. Poignant, fleet
Ecstatic moments—childish feet—
The silent guest—slow aching tears—
Will mellow them till they shall be
Subdued to life. Becoming part
Of dreams and memories of man's heart,
They gain a simple dignity.

TOUCHED WITH SPLENDOR

O luminous earth,
To other worlds a bright
Familiar star—
As Venus is to us—or Jupiter—
Flaming through cold immensity
Around the dazzling speedway of the sun;
As you consume the shining hours,
There drifts across your breast
A speck of dust,
Designed by some mysterious law
As your interpreter.

THAT WHICH ABIDES

Just such a block of marble one might see
Discarded near old quarry beds in Greece;
Too small for sale, a stained and jagged piece
Of seeming worthless stone all ruthlessly
Exposed to sun and wind's disparity,
Till gods of small hurt things willed a surcease
From loneliness, and sent to its release
One dreaming of some rapt felicity.
With loving hands and steel of tempered might,
He carved until the stone was smooth and square:
With curves and angles, making shade and light,
He labored long with skilled and patient care
Till suddenly there trembled into sight
Love's recompense—a face unearthly fair.

THE PETAL

My heart embraced her loveliness. The grace
Of drowsy willows in the wind, I thought,
Sways in her motion. Kindly Nature wrought
Perfection in the flowering of her face.
Without light roses wither; Time's dull pace
Will leave his footprints. Vainly I had brought
Her my devotion—a white champion fought
Against dark sorrow—grief usurped love's place.

To-night I ventured to be over-bold:
She cried this crystal is my heart, and tears
Brim it. Then I remembered that wise seer's
Devising when a goblet could not hold
Another drop. Look, dear, past your belief
Love's petal floats upon your tears and grief.

A SONG

There seem to be swift marching feet,
The vibrant beating of a drum,
A stirring chord of melody
Singing that you have come.

O eager, thought-enshadowed face,
Your keen yet deeply tender eyes
Have looked upon the ageless sea
Until they too are wise.

The supple hand that throbs in mine,
Though nature wove its perfect mesh
Of conscious nerve and branching vein
Is something more than flesh.

When spirit through restraining bars,
Another captive soul shall greet
In language clearer far than words,
Life's meaning is complete.

TO THE BELOVED

Words cannot compass you,
Nor colors seize the essence
Of your loveliness.
An inner grace, strong as a magnet;
Ethereal as spirit;
Pervades you, overflowing
In lucent waves of delight.
You need no reason for existing,
But as the rose
Repays in fragrance and beauty,
So you fulfill the law
Merely through being.

EXPECTANT

Death cannot pledge Love constancy, the grave
Is too uncertain. No mere man can tell
How many curious things arise in Hell
To hold the interest. Thunder-crash of brave
Wild music, hero dimly seen, king, slave,
A galaxy of beauty. Once befell
A mighty splendor, high, incredible!
The Christ came seeking captive souls to save.

Then instantly great Lucifer was naught
But fool. Christ's face, a prayer; His step, a song;
His cause, triumphant. Picture such a scene!
Imagination kindles at the thought
Of Him among that dark imperious throng:—
Satanic pomp; the lowly Nazarene.

AGE FORGETS

I saw them standing there with parted lips,
Like children in the tawny yule-log's flame,
Hand clasped in hand, two people in one dream,
Lost to the memory of home and name.

They stood entranced; a glow burned in their eyes
As fierce and tender as a mother's smile;
They saw not poverty, nor sensed earth's pain;
Life's world had dropped away long mile on mile.

I pondered deep what had enchanted them
To blind young eyes to earth, to Heaven above;
I thought some wizard hand had magicked them,
For I am old . . . and had forgotten love.

THE PERFECT LOVER

My lover has been fond and ever mine:
Full many vows have shattered like thin glass,
Inadequate protection for a shrine
Too easily defaced. But our lives pass
A pageantry, from beryl-throated June
Till Charles' white tandem draws his silver wain
Across December skies. From shining noon
The quick bright moments fly to noon agian.

Inquisitive! You could not compass this,
You are too modern. But the only way
To hold philandering man—come: do not miss
The secret every woman learns some day—
Draw nearer! Meet him by most happy chance
Imprisoned in old volumes of romance.

UNMEASURABLE

The slumbering sap within the wood
Through leaf and bud is understood.

Earth yearning up—such mountains are—
Makes holy places seem not far.

The elements; the stars, the sun;
Reveal their secrets one by one.

But love escapes triumphantly
To laugh at my stupidity.

Although the flattering breath of spring
Sets pulses leaping, paints the wing;

And kisses dropping clover-dew
Seek eager lips, and cling there too,

Pale flesh forgets; the waning moon
Dissolves the dream too soon—too soon.

But is this love? Love's measuring-rod
Lies secret in the hand of God.

THE FIRST EASTER

It did not come in glory
With rushing of great wings,
But in a quiet garden
Among sweet growing things.

Nor did some monarch trumpet
The tidings writ in flame . . .
Only a faithful woman
By love released from shame.

THE LEGEND

(Suggested by hearing Zimbalist play "Lègende")

Expectant, in the tower of that vast pile,—
Haunted by deeds of men long turned to dust,—
We waited till the highnoon of the night,
While he told me this tale more pitiful
Than that of anyone who needs must die
For love. It was the legend of his house,
And this the chosen night her ghost returned
To visit earth again. He whispered low
In broken bits I join as best I may.

Once deep within a garden's fair enclose
Where fountains flung a silvery mist upon
The breeze; the youngest daughter of the house,
Enchanting as the damask rose that gave
Its ardent soul to night, was loitering
In April's scented dusk, when carelessly
She met a warm, compelling glance, and flame
Leaped in her blood that still consumes her ashes.
He never told this stranger's name, nor when
And where they met again to speak of love,
But hinted at some dire and hateful thing
That followed swift upon discovery.

He ceased; but presently, as though constrained,
He called her, Grace, the fairest of his line.
When he thus softly spoke her name, a shadow
Seemed but to drift, and then become a woman.
Deep in her troubled eyes there still remained
The agony of mind she had endured.
Her punishment was not of flesh; it seems
They found some subtler way to break her heart.
Hot tears of pity stung my lids; when I
Had brushed their blinding mist away, I turned,
But she had fled before the silent dawn.

SANCTUARY

The outer door that guards my heart
I firmly close,
And all the earth becomes
A fragrant rose.
The voice of traffic fades away
Into the quiet yesterday.

Always my vanished hour of grace
Is waiting there;—
Pure as the morning star,
And far more fair.
This gift has life vouchsafed to me
To know love's deathless constancy.

HOMESICK

I am homesick
Not for what is,
But for what has passed away.

I would see again
The wide, gray house upon the hill;
See it is actuality;
Not as a memory that comes at will,
But with tall, generous-rooted trees,
Gardens where crisp, delicious berries grew
That the blackbirds fancied, too,
And I would dream
Once more in spacious rooms
Filled with soft laughter
And the sound of tears.
It is incredible
That a few unnoticed years
Could render into air
The things that seemed
So permanent.

I am homesick
Not for what is,
But for that which is no more.

IN SYLLABLES OF FIRE

Great jewels gleaming on night's dusky breast,
Flinging bright glory far across the sky,
How often pleading eyes sought your behest,
Stupendous Urim-Thummim blazing high!

Chaldean priests had watched, and Persian, too,
Pondering with awe your calm majestic light,
Each lucent gem a flaming word of new
Portentous meaning written on the night.

In mystery and wonder you have shone
On Egypt's pyramids and Troy long dead,
Judean lilies have your splendor known;—
That I should see you shining overhead!

Undimmed by time's slow-footed, grim advance,
Deathless, and clothed in awful radiance.

VISIONS

They told me when a wondering child,
Could I achieve a swift-winged flight
To some tree's sunlit pinnacle,
The Heavens would open to my sight.

My childish faith long since destroyed,
Evoked a dream of greater worth;
For now I know who plants a tree
Brings shining visions down to earth.

THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL

St. Augustine turns westward to the sea;
Her pathway is a scarf across the breast
Of opal distances. Here romance prest
Bright lips upon the cheek of proud grandee.
Pale mosses silver every ancient tree
With pendant wreaths to honor men who rest
Remote from yearning tides. The saffron west
Flames to the pean of faith's victory.
A thousand roses fill the languid air
With passionate regret; a strange delight
Beats in the pulses to a lost refrain;
Reflections gleam, like myriad fireflies, where
The eager spur once sparkled in the night—
Yet clings the charm and mystery of Spain.

SPRING'S SILVER HORNS ARE BLOWING

Now earth
Is conscious of the quickening
Of some wild lovely thing,—
A joy vouchsafed,—whose birth
Endowing nature with rare beauty,
Will remove the curse
Of winter's barrenness.
There is an urge and mystery abroad;
From voids become articulate
Steals forth a deeper note;
Love reigns; life shall progress.
The wine of odorous blossoming,
Delicate and remote,
And yet too heady to be freely quaft,
Intoxicates the blood
With that enchanted draft
Called spring.

THE GARDEN

If you have mingled with the crowd
When streets were warm with life,
And watched the current ebb and flow,
High-colored, changing, rife.

If you have stood among tall trees,
Or on a distant hill ,
Or listened to the lulling surf
While fancy roams at will:

You may have found some gift of joy
To treasure for your own!
But would you know rare happiness,
Then you must walk alone

In some old moonlit garden, hushed
In fragrant quietude;
A place, like some familiar friend,
That knows your every mood.

MEMORIES

How the white lilacs appeal to my senses,
Make a new world of enchantment appear!
Fill me with longings and visions of beauty
Vibrant with music no mortal may hear.

Why should their perfume incite me to dreaming
Wild thoughts that reason refutes all in vain?
Fantasies, pleasurings, yearning emotions
Stab at my pulses with exquisite pain.

Was it in springs of some happy existence
I knew them blossoming fragrant and fair?
Memory clinging to lost days of Eden
Stirs to the call of the lilac-drenched air?

THE DESERT

All noon
A devil danced
Upon the blistering sand,
Clothed in shimmering robes
Of heat.

At his command
Gray phantoms of the past
Filed by on bleeding feet.
Their eyeballs sunken to deep wells
Of misery;
And blackened tongues
Went babbling endlessly
Of icy springs
In some green distant land.

But night
Descended softly
As a vesper hymn;
The west wind's healing
In her hand,
Crowned with immortal stars,
Serene and beautiful.

SUNRISE IN ARIZONA

Who would believe such colors could exist—
Outside some painter's bright, fantastic dream—
As sunbreak pours in an ethereal stream
Upon bleak mountain crag? A gold-spun mist
Has shattered into bluish amethyst,
Rose, turquoise—indescribable! We seem
To watch creation struggling to redeem
The void with force no darkness could resist.
And thus the sun, responding to the call
When consciousness passed quivering into light,
Leaps into being from his death-like sleep
To spread a radiant splendor over all,
As on that morning of unbroken night,
When one great Voice first thundered on the deep.

THE MONUMENT TO SEAGULLS

(Salt Lake City)

Impossible! Some trick of weary sight
Imagined seagulls on that thirsty plain.
Oh, had the people's heart returned in vain
Remembrance of white wings in soaring flight
Against a misty sky? How other might
Old Neptune's birds be pictured there? (Through rain
I saw relentless, iron-shod clifts again,
And heard wild breakers crashing in the night.)

The hand that set those gleaming pinions free
Proclaimed a mighty miracle. Not grief
But joy recorded wonder past belief:
When insects threatened famine, suddenly,
Their fluttering wings like snowflakes whirled in air,
Sharp-beaked, intent, the seagulls came—from where?

THE ALIEN SEA

All land's delight was given man
To pleasure and to satisfy;
But as he tamed it to his plan,
He heard wild hoof-beats racing by.

Unbridled runs the plunging sea,
A fierce gray stallion strong and fleet
That paws the shore tempestuously:—
Beware the thunder of his feet.

Earth nurtured us, for our first sin
Was thistle crowned and brier dressed;
When spirit wears the body thin,
We mingle with her dust, at rest.

Man claims no kinship with the sea—
A witch's changling, swift and bold—
Whose victims wander endlessly,
Homesick for earth, white-ribbed and cold.

TREES OF MY DELIGHT

A measure of bright chestnuts
  Was given me today,
And like a magic carpet
  They carried me away.
I saw the green far-reaching hills
  Where I have yearned to be,
Their outline dimmed by sudden tears,—
  The mist of memory.

O unforgotten beauty!
  Where laurel bloom is bright,
And dog-wood's bridal garment
  Is virginal and white;
There pennyroyal's pungent leaves
  Plunder the ravished sense,
While rippling, slender grasses run
  In silver opulence.

I thought of sunny places
  Where wind-flowers used to grow;
Cool, splashing, crystal water
  My lips have longed to know.
There stately trees are standing, priests
  Of some mysterious rite,
Their strong arms raised to bless the land,—
  O trees of my delight.

THE GREAT WHITE FLEET

On such a day as only western breeze
Allures from paradise, remembrance brought
A vision of immortal argosies—
The snowy fleet of desert ships that sought
To gain a friendly shore. Swift time has spun
Its seamless web upon the deeds of those
Who set stern faces towards the burnished sun . . .
Once squadrons plunged where richest amber flows
In shining waves of undulating wheat.
Grave men adventuring the golden haze
In swaying wagon-boats; there unshod feet
Of plodding oxen went uncharted ways
Across a sea of beryl; and many a bright
Unfaltering eye wept secretly at night.

Wild Norsemen in their serpent-guarded ships
When nipping winds plucked music from taut
ropes,
Had heard no mightier shrill from bearded lips
In wassail cheer to animate dead hopes,
Than Zephyrs sang to them. Each plain and peak
Provocative, that wrapped the changing view
In mystery, but led them on to seek
The vast unknown that touched the distant blue.
No stately galleon leaving sun-drenched Spain,
Nor keel laved by the purple waves of Tyre,
Nor treasure-ship that sought the shore in vain,
Went heavier laden with their heart's desire
Than these unwieldly barges of the west,
That bravely struggled towards a misty bar.
Their captain wore no order on his breast,
But steered by radiance of a brilliant star.

Bold, conquering fleets of Egypt and of Rome;
Phenician barques, the sails of Christopher;
The white Mayflower that sweetened alien loam,
Have never been to any land more dear
Than pioneers to us. They tasted night,
The silence of the dawn, and found them good.
When wisdom touched their eyes with mystic light,
Though inarticulate, they understood.
Clad in rude homespun, visioning strange things
Impalpable to earthy bone and brawn,
Assured in spirit as the brown bird sings
Expectant of the sun before the dawn;
Daring the perils of a trackless sea,
They learned the meaning of infinity.
When twilight softly fell, they heard the call
Of chanting waters far beyond earth's scope,
And journeyed to the utmost port of all,
Leaving rich legacy of faith and hope.
The world has seen no truer men than these,
Nor braver women. Though ethereal goals
May lure, Great Pilot, let them ride at ease
In love-locked harbors. . . . Peace unto their
souls!

RIDERS OF THE AIR

Like Ganymede on the eagle's back,
  They ride their planes from shore to shore;
Across this wind-swept, cloud-paved track
  Manhattan knocks at the western door.
Land seems a parquetry to blend
  Buff, brown, and green; the rivers, rills
That Lilliputian contents send
  Into gem-lakes set in dark hills.
    They floating wide
    On crystal tide
  Forget earth and its ills.

The teeming plains of Illinois,
  Nebraska where the Chinooks blow,
Each offers them its gift of joy.
  Missouri's muddy waters flow
By famous grounds: here heroes passed—
  Boone, Bonneville, and Lewis, Clark,—
Who nailed their daring banners fast
  And set for us a shining mark.
Their spirits meet on trails of sky
  These later heroes, men of power,
When hail and sleet and lightning vie
  To rend the quaking clouds that lour;
    And honor then
    These flying-men
  And aid them in that hour.

On blue nights when the white stars blaze,
  Men climb an amaranthine way;
They glide along a silent maze
  And join the meteors in play,
To share the ecstasy it brings;
  Then search the distant earth for light
The seven-fold stations send to wings
  That have grown weary in their flight!
      And would rest there
      In thoughtful care
  Of those who serve the night.

The broadening Platte where old trails cross,
  Where tomahawk and bright swords met;
Where wild winds wail of bitter loss,
  But rivers flow, and soon forget;
This burning way the Morman trod
  A desert kinder than his fears,
To gain the garden spot of God,
  Whose flowers know his blood and tears:
      Now bird-men race,
      A flash in space
  Where he tramped weary years.

Come trackless stretches of the waste
  Where desolation sears the eye;
Heart cries to willing ear, "Make haste!"
  And throbs a prayer as they skim by.
Night dies; then lilac, rose and gold
  Leap into life; men catch their breath—
What is this vision they behold?
  It might be Heaven after death
And not mere sunlight on the snow
  Of gleaming mountain-top. They flee
Like homing dove to loft, and go
  To meet the earth with grace as free;
      Then come to rest
      In home of blest
  St. Francis by the sea.

NOT FORGOTTEN

Though the black camel halts beside my gate,
And phantoms cry, "Away, we cannot wait!"
Yet may dread death withhold his awful curse
From part of me that lives within my verse!

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